WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
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The State of Interoperable Communications: Perspectives from State and Local Governments

DEVELOPING A SPECIFIC INTEROPERABLE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY IS PARAMOUNT TO SUCCESS

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Charles Werner and I am the Fire Chief for the City of Charlottesville, Virginia and have served in the fire-rescue service for over 30 years.

I serve on the Communications Committee of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). I also serve as the Virginia Fire Chiefs Technology/Interoperability Chair and on the Virginia Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee (VA SIEC – past Chair).

Citizens rely upon their local and state police agencies, sheriffs' offices, fire departments and emergency medical services to come to their assistance wherever and whenever needed, whether it is crime in progress, a civil disturbance, a building fire, a forest fire, an automobile accident, a health emergency, a natural disaster, or, as we learned on 9/11, a terrorist attack. Citizens assume that those first responders will get the call and will have the communications tools they need to address emergencies quickly and efficiently.

Radio operability is critical for public safety agencies to maintain the communications capability that we need to protect the safety of life and property. In cases of larger and more complex incidents interoperability becomes very important in order to maintain the continuity of command and control. Interoperability has been an ongoing public safety issue for decades and reinforced after major catastrophes across the United States.

Since 9/11, the need for public safety communications interoperability has increased as law enforcement, fire, EMS are being asked to assume greater roles in roles of homeland security.

Today, I will speak to you from three different vantage points. First I will give an overview from the 10,000 foot view by reviewing Virginia's efforts and outcomes. Second, I will provide you a view from ground level where I serve as the regional interoperability project manager for the

City of Charlottesville, County of Albemarle and the University of Virginia. Last, I will express my experiences and observations at the national level as I serve on SAFECOM's Executive Committee as one of its public safety practitioner members.

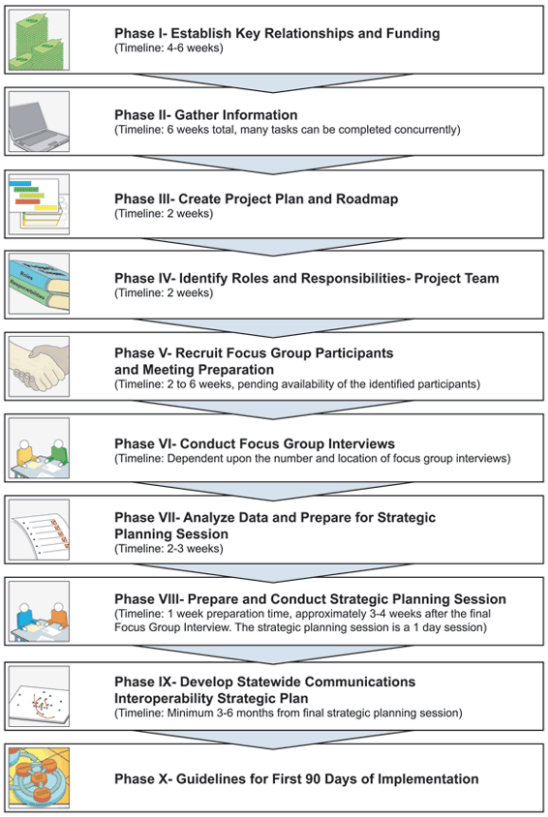
Virginia's Interoperability Efforts – "10,000 foot aerial view"

I have been specifically asked to explain about Virginia's methodology for developing a statewide interoperable strategic plan. Having served as Virginia's SIEC Chair during the majority of this process I am pleased to share what has been a very positive and proactive process.

The Virginia methodology for addressing interoperability at the state level mirrored the process developed by Office of Interoperability/SAFECOM. SAFECOM worked with Virginia to customize the methodology and was designed to be an effective tool to help local governments and states to improve public safety communications across disciplines and jurisdictions. Virginia's efforts resulted in a comprehensive plan that addresses the interoperability needs and challenges of Virginia's public safety community as identified by Virginia's public safety practitioners. The key is that the initiatives are public safety practitioner (boots on the ground) driven at the state and federal levels.

Virginia's Statewide Communications Interoperability Planning (SCIP) methodology has now been institutionalized as a model that can be accessed from the Internet (http://www.safecomprogram.gov/SAFECOM/library/interoperabilitycasestudies/1223_statewidecommunications.htm).

The SCIP methodology is broken down into ten essential planning phases that local government and states can use to create their own communications plan.



The process has yielded the following positive outcomes:

- Formation of Virginia's SIEC
- Formation of a supporting Advisory Group
- Hiring of a full time Interoperability Coordinator
- Implemented a supportive program management office
- Conducted two statewide interoperability conferences
- Developed, implemented and updated the Statewide Interoperability Strategic Plan
- Legislated that the Statewide Interoperability Plan would be updated annually
- Legislated that by 2015 grant funding would only be awarded to submissions that meet the goals of the plan
- A better understanding of what efforts were underway and ways to maximize them

Virginia's success in the area of interoperable communications would not have been possible if it weren't for the leadership and support of Virginia Governor Mark Warner and his administration. I would also be remiss if I did not acknowledge that much of this work was achieved alongside a very supportive cast member who now serves as our Under Secretary of Emergency Preparedness, George Foresman. Federal grant funding must be also noted as a key catalyst to those successes at the state and local levels.

Please carefully note that the successes in Virginia have been the result of the "people processes" and that technology only supports what people-in this case our local and state elected and appointed officials – have agreed to.

A National Demonstration Project:
Charlottesville-Albemarle-University of Virginia – "a ground level view"

The Charlottesville region is living proof that the Virginia (SAFECOM) model works. Chosen as the #1 City in America in 2004, this region includes the City of Charlottesville, County of Albemarle and the University of Virginia with a geographic land mass of approximately 744 square miles and includes both flat and mountainous terrain.

The University of Virginia (UVA) also adds the element of a university town with a sizeable student, faculty and staff population.

In addition to UVA, the region is home to other national treasures such as Thomas Jefferson's home, *Monticello* and James Monroe's home, *Ashlawn*.

In 2003, the region developed a national demonstration project that was submitted and awarded one of the few $6M FEMA Interoperable Communications Equipment grants. This project is governed by all three jurisdictions and public safety practitioners of every discipline (Law Enforcement, Fire, EMS, and Emergency Management).

An overview of what the region has done to create a robust, redundant and resilient interoperable system is as follows:

- Developed a parallel and secondary public safety communications network for logistical communications using Nextel's PTT (because Nextel's iDEN network is the only PTT or walkie-talkie service that does not rely on the public telephone switch).

- In the process of implementing a robust Motorola 800 MHz digital/analog public safety mission critical radio system which provides communications to every public safety agency in the region (20+ agencies). This will support the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

- In the process of implementing console integration between the Nextel iDEN network and the Motorola 800 MHz radio system to allow communication between Nextel talk groups and Motorola talk groups. This enables us to reach out to non public safety agencies to create an affordable way to establish a "Whole Community Approach" and bring in other agencies such as public works, health departments, schools and more.

- In the process of implementing a M-A/COM Mobile Data System that will serve all public safety agencies in the region to provide information such as law enforcement vehicle and criminal wants and warrants, building floor plans, emergency operations plans, etc.

- In addition to fixed infrastructure, this project also addresses tactical interoperability at an incident site beyond the normal day to day operations which meets the RAPIDCOM recommendations (to achieve incident interoperability within one hour of the incident) and supports the communications with the federal agencies as outlined in the National Response Plan (NRP). This tactical equipment was chosen because of its effectiveness, simplicity and price:

- Incident Commander's Radio Interface (ICRI) – tested and listed by several DoD evaluations. It is a true plug and play technology and is EASY.

- Edge Access self deploying Satellite - Voice over IP (VoIP) which also establishes satellite telephone service, an internet connection and establishes a quarter mile hotspot which can be set up in a matter of 5 minutes or less by simply turning on and pushing one button. THIS IS IN MY VEHICLE TODAY AND I WOULD BE GLAD TO DEMONSTRATE IT ANYTIME.

  NOTE: CHARLOTTESVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT'S UNIT WITH THIS TACTICAL EQUIPMENT RESPONDED TO AND WAS USED IN HANCOCK, MS FOLLOWING HURRICANE KATRINA.

- In the area of situational awareness, the region has implemented WebEOC (same as the National Capital Region – Virginia, Maryland, District of Columbia) to share information between jurisdictions and disciplines.

- In the process of implementing DMIS (Disaster Management Interoperability Software). This is one of the E-Gov Disaster Management tools.

- In the process of implementing the Emergency Email Wireless Network to serve as interoperable communications with the public through email and other wireless devices.

SAFECOM's Efforts – "a 30,000 foot aerial view"

As one of the public safety practitioners that serve on the SAFECOM Executive Committee that has been directly involved at both the state and local level I would like to share the following observations:

1. SAFECOM is having a real impact and is a genuinely practitioner driven program. It is the primary federal focus on interoperability and needs to be made and kept strong.

2. Standards are very important, but be cautious about requiring a particular standard to meet all occasions. For example, a smaller public safety agency that does not have a trunked radio system does not need to be buying $4,000 P25 radios when $500 analog radios would suffice. Make sure that standards are robust and can actually meet practitioner needs before requiring them.

3. Most of achieving near term interoperability is a matter of two things:

a. Build an effective "operable" system, first, then

b. Commit to interoperability because at the end of the day, achieving a reasonable level of emergency interoperability requires a willingness to cooperate among and between agencies and jurisdictions more than it requires a particular technology.

4. Finally, recognize that full interoperability, and all the critical life saving capabilities it offers, is a long term mission. Don't sacrifice the long term goal of full interoperability by focusing only on the near term problem**.**

Charlottesville Fire Department Tactical Interoperability Solution in use at an Incident

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